

W H E R E D E S I G N E R S D W E L L !  
A Review of "100+ 1 Pakistani Architects and their Own Houses"  
by Mukhtar Husain

Professor Dr Noman Ahmed  
Department of Architecture and Planning  
NED University of Engineering and Technology

The book is an output of a sizable effort and labour undertaken by Mukhtar Husain, a very well known architect famous for his scholarly pursuits and inclinations. The topic was pertinent to be explored in respect to the chronological transformations that have taken place in the post independence architectural scene in the country. While it may appear that access to the information and resources related to architects' own houses may have been a smooth sailing, it seems to have been simply otherwise. The author had to undertake continuous liaison with the architects included in the volume (or their near and dear ones), coordination to update the information and finally transform the documentation work into a book format. At each stage, the effort had to be guided by the daunting precaution not to miss out any image, reference or detail that may have been necessary to provide the desirable picture to the readers. Undoubtedly the outcome is a useful product reflecting the skills, efforts and precaution contributed in the inputs.

The author has adopted a very simple narrative style in the opening essays. This makes the book worthy of capturing a wide readership including art critics, journalists, engineers, planners, sociologists or even common housewives! The documentation is presented in a neutral manner giving due coverage to the ideas and aspirations of the designers themselves. The book shows that the choices were made without any selective restraint applied to the examples. Thus a non controversial sample has evolved due to this open-ended approach. Peer review by two eminent architects namely (late) Prof. Kausar Bashir Ahmad and Prof. Arif Hasan has added further value to the noteworthy effort.

Since the author belongs to the same profession, his statements and depiction remains politically

correct without being judgmental or critical at any instance. The interpretations in this respect are left open for the readers, reviewers and critics to dwell around the examples contained in the volume. Design of the book is undertaken in a populist manner which, at times, is not necessarily architectural in its bearing. Colour compositions, paper sizing, icons and quality of graphics are all done across the same theme. More serious architectural researchers may find the lack of detailed technical information as a handicap.

The book has unveiled a broad agenda of exploration, inviting the architectural researchers to further extrapolate this spine of knowledge. The author has presented a set of tables about the educational background and short biographical references. Interesting correlations can be drawn from this information and the design of their houses. Stylistic criticism, derivation of local variables in architectural interpretations, attempts to derive certain local principles of design and construction are other related areas that invite the attention of serious architectural researchers. Scaling the commercial success of architects viz a viz the strength of design ideas may form a subsidiary trajectory of exploration. One must also not forget to investigate the cases of such architects "who could not make their own houses!"

A missing dimension in the book is the information about the contextual setting of each unit presented. Probably the insertion of a key location map or street photograph may have greatly enriched the visual evidences in the contents of the book.